

# O. Henry Added to Literary Arts Series



On September 11 in Greensboro, N.C., at the Greensboro Historical Museum, the USPS issued the O. Henry Forever commemorative (priced at 45¢) in one design in a pressure-sensitive adhesive (PSA) pane of 20. The latest stamp in the Literary Arts series celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Wil-

liam S. Porter, who used the pen name O. Henry and wrote nearly 300 tales.

By the time of his death, O. Henry was the most widely read storyteller in America. The dominant sense of comedy is unmistakable in O. Henry's work. In the stamp art, the author's portrait is set against a background image of the elevated rail in New York City, where many of his stories were set. The portrait is based on a photograph of the author as a young man. Illustrator Cap Pannell worked with art director and stamp designer Ethel Kessler on this stamp art.

O. Henry's adventurous personal life was almost more exciting than his short stories, which are famous for their wit, wordplay, warm characterization and clever twist endings. In began in North Carolina as a licensed pharmacist, then moved to Texas where he worked as a ranch hand, draftsman, bank teller and journalist—and took up writing. Other talents included an artist, singer and musician.

While in Texas he also worked full time on his humorous weekly called *The Rolling Stone* from 1894 to 1895, when it failed. But as a result of his time as a bank teller he was charged with bank embezzlement, and fled to New Orleans and then Honduras, where he wrote *Cabbages and Kings*, in which he coined the phrase “banana republic.”

Porter returned to Texas and surrendered so he could be with his ailing wife. After she died he spent time in the Ohio Penitentiary where he served as a pharmacist, all the while writing under different names including O. Henry. Explanations for how he chose his pen name vary, and Porter gave different answers when people asked. Some believe that “O. Henry” may be a condensation of “Ohio State Penitentiary.”

*O. Henry's Full House* is a 1952 anthology film consisting of five separate stories by O. Henry. The film was produced by André Hakim and directed by five separate directors from five separate screenplays. The music score was composed by Alfred Newman and the film is narrated by author John Steinbeck, who made an on-camera appearance to introduce each story. The five stories are *The Cop and the Anthem*, *The Clarion Call*, *The Last Leaf*, *The Ransom of Red Chief*, and *The Gift of the Magi*. A promotional poster for the movie is shown here.

Porter was a heavy drinker, and his health deteriorated markedly. He died on June 5, 1910, of cirrhosis of the liver. After his death, his friends established the O. Henry Prize Stories, an anthology published annually since 1919 to honor him and to encourage the ongoing development of the art of the short story.

A total of 20 million O. Henry stamps were printed by Avery Dennison using a gravure engraved process. Colors used were yellow, magenta, cyan, black and green. Plate numbers in the four corners of each pane consist of the letter “V” to identify Avery Dennison as the printer, followed by five single digits, one for each color.

For first day cancellations, the usual rules apply. Purchase the O. Henry stamps from the USPS or a stamp dealer, affix them to envelopes of choice addressed to yourself or others and send them by November 12, 2012, in an outer envelope to O. Henry Stamp, Greensboro Main Office, 201 N. Murrow Blvd., Greensboro, NC 27420-9998. You may also enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope in which your covers can be returned to protect them from damage or double-cancellation in the mail.

